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L E T T E R S
T O
THE REV. DR. PRIESTLEY,
IN VINDICATION OF
THOSE ALREADY ADDRESSED TO HIM,
ON THE
I N F A L L I B I L I T Y
O F T H E
A P O S T O L I C T E S T I M O N Y,
C O N C E R N I N G
T H E P E R S O N O F C H R I S T.

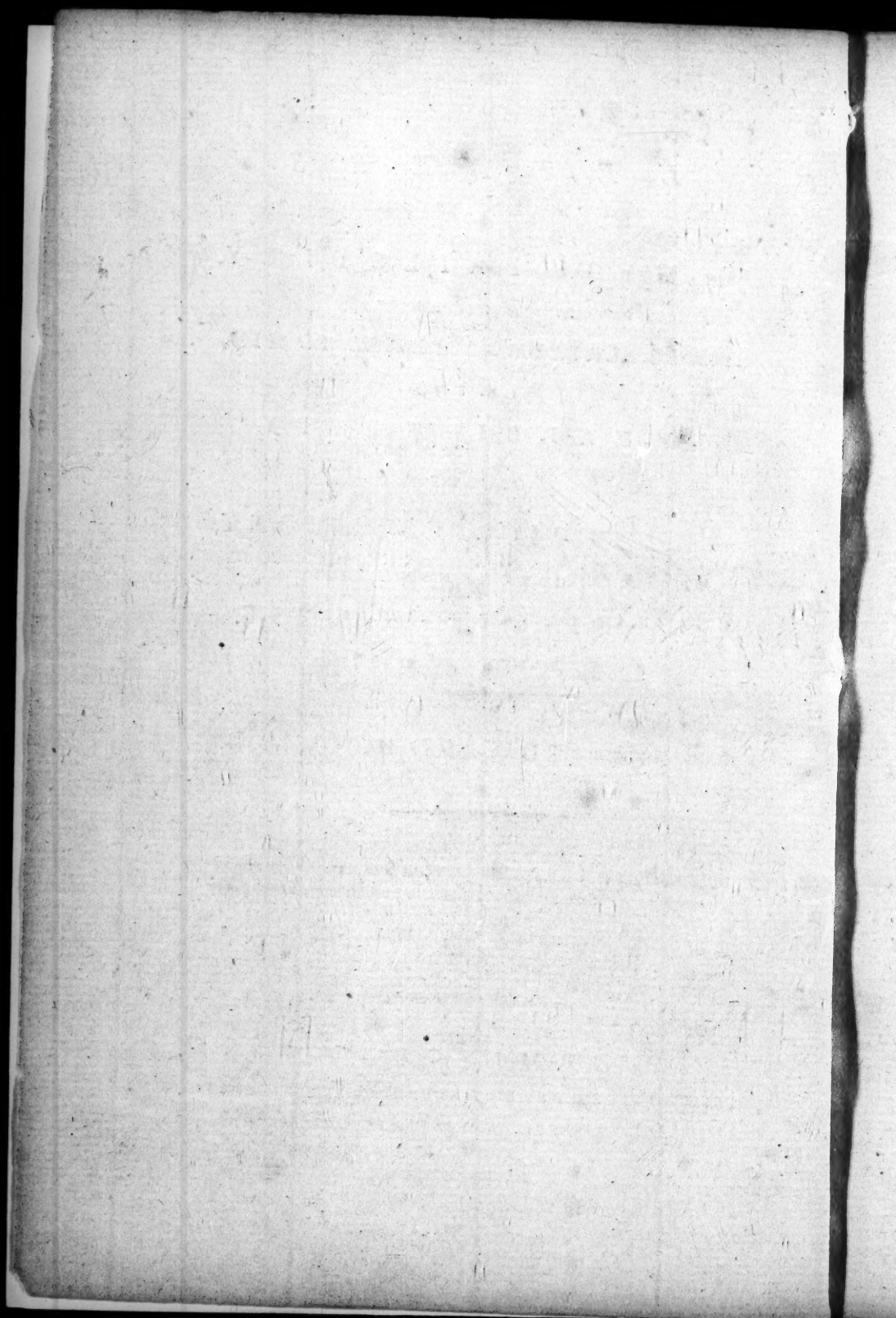
By THE REV. EDWARD BURN, A. B.

If there be reason in what I have offered, it will prevail with reasonable men; if there be not, I am not so unreasonable as to desire it should.

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

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L E T T E R I.

REV. SIR,

YOUR very early attention to my letters has conferred a distinction on me in a high degree flattering, and which some of your correspondents (not equally honoured) may be inclined to interpret as an invidious preference shewn to a neighbour with "whom " you have some acquaintance, and whom you " are in the habit of occasionally meeting." Your attention is, I confess, as extraordinary as it is equivocal. For when it is recollected in what light my letters must have appeared to you before you condescended to reply, your having chosen *me* as the object of such an honour will no doubt excite more than ordinary curiosity in the minds of the public. That a series of letters written (as you say

A

mine

mine were) without any regard to *truth* or even the *appearance* of truth; which contain little else than a *calumnious misrepresentation* of your sentiments, expressly with [the view of rendering your person obnoxious in this neighbourhood; and by a man too whose readers in general are prepared to receive *whatever* he may think proper to advance: that such *palpable, gross* and *unfounded calumny* should have been deemed worthy of reply, and by a person of your eminence and established reputation in the world, is somewhat problematical. To your own adherents it was certainly not necessary, because acquainted as we may justly suppose them to be with your real opinions, the misrepresentation must strike *them* at once; to the world it will I presume be considered as in a great measure superfluous; for men in general are sufficiently prepared to detect *falsehoods* so palpable as those are which my letters are represented to contain; and to my friends (if you may be credited) a reply, be it ever so excellent, must prove ineffectual. Men so blindly and obstinately *prepossessed* will not easily be prevailed on to listen to any thing offered in confutation of their prejudices: unless we suppose that the *candour, gentleness, and moderation* which so eminently distinguish your letters may have obtained for you, on this occasion, a favourable hearing. But you indulge the hope
that

that this discussion may excite a more general attention to your other writings, and for this there are no doubt *sufficient reasons*. This object, however, which you have so much at heart is, I confess, an event which I anticipate without regret; having long settled it in my own mind, as a certain principle, that while a proper regard for the sacred scriptures retains its influence in this country, the more extensively your opinions are known the more universally will they be reprobated, as tending in a direct manner to weaken the *credibility*, and to defeat the *end* of the christian dispensation. This view of your opinions which I have considered more at large in my letters, you treat as a gross misrepresentation of your real sentiments, and I can readily suppose that with persons, unacquainted with *your manner* in controversy, you have in some measure succeeded. As the object of my first letters was not to establish my own infallibility in opposition to that of Dr. Priestley, I shall ever be ready to set him an example of temper in acknowledging whatever shall fairly appear to have been an oversight, or a misrepresentation of his opinions; but as I never do entertain, much less publish, a *falsehood* knowing it to be such, I have, Sir, nothing of this sort to defend: nor shall I ever be prevailed on to retract what appears to me important truth; no: not

if it should even bring upon me a second attack from you, *more liberal* and *dispassionate* than that which is now before the public. My *motives* in this business appear to have engaged no inconsiderable share of your candid attention: but whether these were "preferment," "a desire of rendering myself conspicuous" by assailing so redoubtable a champion, or "of rescuing my attachment to the Church of England from those suspicions of insincerity to which former connections might expose it," will not I believe be deemed my present concern with Dr. Priestley. The public can certainly feel no particular interest in the biography of so obscure an individual as myself. From whom descended, what have been my advantages of education, how connected with respect to family interests, are questions which in my vulgar apprehension, have no necessary connection with the apostolic testimony, or with my views of Dr. Priestley's sentiments on that subject. But I forbear. A propensity to speak of one's-self is not, I find, the infirmity of *old* writers only. Besides not having written a *preface*, any attempt on my part to entertain, or to interest the public in this way might possibly be charged on me as a breach of privilege. Waving, therefore, all further reference to myself, and keeping the
character

character and behaviour of my antagonist (particularly on this occasion) as much as possible out of view: the question divested of all such unimportant incumbrances, with which the public is concerned, is simply this; *whether my statement of Dr. Priestley's opinion, concerning the inspiration of the apostles, be a misrepresentation of his real sentiments on that subject?* This point once settled, other matters of secondary consequence in my letters to which your ingenuity may have given the appearance of misrepresentation, will, I trust, be easily and satisfactorily accounted for.

I am, &c.

character and behavior of my antagonist
(especially in this matter) as much as
possible out of view: a position desired
of all fair-minded persons. With
this the public is concerned is simply this:
whether the conduct of the public relation con-
cerning the matter of the case is a proper
foundation for the judgment in the case. The
point once settled, other means of recovery
concerning it may follow to which your in-
terference may have given the appearance of
interference, will, I think, be easily and
satisfactorily accounted for.

L E T T E R II.

REV. SIR,

I HAVE ever considered that to misrepresent a writer, was either artfully to mistake his real sentiments, or by false deduction to charge them with consequences which they will not justify. Admitting this definition to be just, I shall now enquire whether it can fairly be said to apply to my conduct on the present occasion.

In the commencement of my second letter to you I have these words. "It is now time that
"the attention of the christian world should be
"recalled to its only proper object in this controversy: this is the apostolic testimony. If
"this be insufficient to fix those ideas which
"it becomes us to entertain of the person of
"Christ, I have no difficulty in affirming that
"the subject must remain for ever undeterminable. With the generality of Protestants, I
"consider this testimony as *infallible*. You have
"taken considerable pains to establish the contrary doctrine; for, to represent the apostles
"as in possession of no information, which secured them from the gross mistakes and prejudices

“ dices of their countrymen, is now become the
 “ *argumentum palmarium* of the Unitarian school.”

This, Sir, is my representation of your opinion on this subject. It is, I grant, strongly expressed, but not more so than the passages which I have adduced in its support, will justify. In order that my leading objection to your theory may appear in its true light, and not in that disjointed form in which you, page 3, present it to our readers; I shall here subjoin the particular passages (now confessedly your own) on which it is founded, leaving the public to judge whether they will authorize the representation already given, and the conclusions founded upon it in my letters. In vol. 4, page 22, of *Theol. Repos.* you express your opinion of the apostles, as interpreters of the ancient scriptures, in these very remarkable words. “ We can satisfy ourselves and others with saying that they (i. e. the apostles) applied the scriptures according to the best of their judgment which would of course (without any particular illumination which does not appear to have been necessary in their case) be *biased* by the mode of applying them prevalent in their age and country; and that consequently we are at liberty to judge of the propriety of all their quotations, as well as of those made by persons

now

“ now living.” And again, page 112, you say,
 “ As to the apostles there will perhaps be no
 “ difficulty in admitting, that the great object of
 “ their mission did not require any particular
 “ illumination with respect to the knowledge of
 “ the scriptures ; and therefore that they would
 “ be naturally influenced by the mode of inter-
 “ pretation, which was generally adopted by
 “ their countrymen.” And in page 442, your
 tone is still more decisive, for you scruple not
 to say (consistently enough I grant with your
 hypothesis) “ It is evident that the apostles
 “ often applied the scriptures very improperly,
 “ and with no better judgment than their un-
 “ believing countrymen.”

These, Sir, in your own words, are the
 passages on which I ground my assertion ;
 “ that to represent the apostles as in possession
 “ of no information which secured them from
 “ the gross mistakes and prejudices of their
 “ countrymen is now become the *argumentum pal-*
 “ *marium* of the Unitarian school.” Whether on
 this *principle* you do professedly, or by fair con-
 sequence invalidate the authority of the apos-
 tolic testimony, is a point which I have al-
 ready discussed, and is by no means essential
 to the present question. The plain and obvi-
 ous enquiry is, have I in the above assertion
 preserved the true sense of the passages cited
 from

from the Theological Repository? You must have known when you undertook your reply that this was the only ground on which to make good your charge of misrepresentation, according to the first sense of the term; unless you found yourself prepared (which from your letters by no means seems to have been the case) to answer the objections brought against your theory. Instead, however, of this fair and manly conduct suiting the dignity of a great writer, you have availed yourself of arts in controversy the least ingenuous, and, in your contest with so young a polemic as myself, the least necessary. Marked and obvious as the distinction is, between my representing you as maintaining an opinion respecting the inspiration of the apostles which tends to invalidate *the infallibility* of their testimony; and your having in the controversy concerning the person of Christ *appealed* to this testimony in support of your opinions; clear as the distinction is between these two points, you have thought proper to confound them; and I will venture to say that on this paltry effort your charge of misrepresentation depends for all its probability and force.

In page 6, you say, "you will find that you yourself cannot *appeal* to the scriptures with more confidence in proof of your opinion concerning

“cerning the person of Christ than I have al-
“ways done in proof of *mine*; having ever con-
“sidered the testimony of the apostles as infalli-
“ble in this case, as much as you can do.”
This, Sir, is a palpable attempt to get rid of
the main question between us. After the most
careful reconsideration of my letters I find but
one passage which affords even colouring for
this evasion. The passage is this. After giv-
ing the general representation of your theory
on which the whole reasoning of my pamphlet
is founded; I add page 9. “It is on this
“ground professedly that the argument from
“the comparison of scripture with itself has by
“you been rejected as utterly impertinent and
“inconclusive.” This passage (though true in
fact) is I freely own too strongly expressed, and
would have stood better as an inference at the
close of my remarks, than in its present situati-
on. This mode however of concluding *peremp-*
torily from the opinions of another without as-
signing the reasons which are supposed to jus-
tify those conclusions is not, I find, peculiar to
myself. You, Sir, have dealt the *same* measure
to me in the very letters now under considera-
tion. For in page 26, you represent me as
“virtually denying the unity of God,” because
I maintain “a trinity of divine persons, or (as
you say) Gods;” and as in fact superceding
“and rendering unnecessary the resurrection of
the

the body by what you call "the doctrine of a
"foul." Now, as I never have maintained privately, or in public professed any theory concerning the *divine nature* which appears to me chargeable with the consequences of nonsense and profaneness here ascribed to my opinions; and as my ideas concerning the human soul are in no sense (with which I am acquainted) calculated to affect the doctrine of a *resurrection*, I might with more than equal justice complain of misrepresentation. But were I in replying to such a representation of my sentiments immediately to fix on this passage, and endeavour to aggravate your conduct without examining the reasons on which it may be founded; I certainly should expect the public would consider me as asking for *credit* in the business. Pardon me, if I say, that this is the very part you have taken in your reply. For conscious (as it should seem) that the charge of invalidating the authority of the apostolic testimony is but too successfully proved upon your opinion, you instantly fasten upon a single sentence in my letters (incautiously expressed and only to be defended as an inference) which, you say, represents you as "refusing to *appeal* to the "scriptures and to abide by their testimony."

This, Sir, was the wisdom of the occasion.
It is your only resource in your present circumstances.

cumstances, and you have certainly improved it in your very best manner. You clearly foresaw that to hold opinions which tend to injure the *credibility* of a witness, and yet to *appeal* to that witness in support of your sentiments, were a contradiction in conduct which the public would not easily be prevailed on to admit in a person of your discernment and avowed integrity. This, however absurd and incredible it may appear, is the fact. For to represent the apostles as men who "often applied the scriptures very improperly and with no better judgment than their unbelieving countrymen," contains a proposition, which (in common construction) involves in it every consequence of injury to the *credibility* of their evidence which I have charged upon it in my letters. After such an attack upon the infallibility of their general testimony, your *appealing* to them (though it may confound the unwary) is a wretched compensation for so great an injury. It certainly proves (what I never meant to call in question) that "you are not afraid" to *appeal* to a testimony in one instance, whose validity on other occasions "you are not afraid" in terms the most unequivocal to bring into doubt. And it as certainly demonstrates (what it materially concerns our readers to attend closely to in this dispute) that by thus artfully shifting the main question

tion between us, you have saved yourself the trouble of replying to my principal objection, and at the same time have given the air of misrepresentation to my argument by what is in fact a mistatement of my real conduct in the business. If there be a *contradiction* in admitting and rejecting by turns the infallibility of an evidence (as you have actually done that of the apostles) and an *absurdity* in still continuing to *appeal* to that evidence; let not the reproach fall on me because it hath fallen to my lot to expose both in Dr. Priestley.

The question, Sir, between us is so clear and simple that it required all your ingenuity and address to perplex and embarrass it. Instead of reciting long passages from your various writings to prove that you have *appealed* to the scriptures in proof of your opinions; your business (you must have known) was to vindicate yourself from the serious charge of holding an opinion which, by fair and necessary deduction, *invalidates the infallibility* of the apostolic testimony. Meet this charge fairly and refute it, and your answer will be complete. But till this be done think not to impose on the common sense of mankind, by exhibiting the mere dexterity of an able disputant.

This,

This, Sir, however it may obtain for you the applause of the moment by what you may deem a triumph over an antagonist not equally hackneyed in the arts of controversy, will not easily be mistaken as an evidence of your supreme love of truth, and is certainly beneath the dignity of a truly great mind. Having said thus much in explanation of my argument, our readers will I trust clearly perceive that the object of my letters was not to call in question your having *appealed* to the scriptures of the New Testament; but to prove that you do entertain, and have taken considerable pains to inculcate an opinion, concerning their *inspiration* which does in fact set aside the *infalibility* of their testimony, and by consequence renders all *appeal* to them in this controversy useless and absurd. Here the business ought properly to rest; but looking farther into your reply, I find, that besides your attempt to divert the public attention from the main question, you have had recourse to another piece of management in your defence not more liberal, nor just. In page 14, you have these words, "Having confidently asserted, and severely censured my utter rejection of scripture evidence, in the controversy concerning the person of Christ, you proceed to a particular instance as an exemplification of my conduct in it. And as it happens that I have actually considered

“ considered the very same text that you produce for this purpose, our readers will have an opportunity of comparing your representation of my treatment of this passage with my own actual treatment of it, &c.”

I confess, Sir, that little as I had to expect from the *known candour* of Dr. Priestley, I was not a little struck with the illiberality of this passage. Such efforts to establish your charge of misrepresentation may not safely be repeated. Even under your auspices they begin to betray some feeble symptoms of conscious impotence. In a young writer they might possibly be charged to the account of inexperience, or over-sight: in you they will not find the like apology. After stating your opinion in the former part of my second letter, I proceed in page 10, to apply it in a particular instance. Now, Sir, as the passage there recited, from the 110th psalm is introduced by every writer in favour of Christ's divinity, with whom I am acquainted, as a clear and decisive proof of that doctrine; I did consider it as a very proper example to illustrate the tendency of your opinion (respecting the apostolic testimony) on that important subject. With this view and this only I introduced it, retaining indeed the *principle* of your objection, which it was my design by this means

means to illustrate, but without any idea of informing the public that *you had actually treated the passage in this manner*. That the passage contains a proof of Christ's divinity was a point that I had a right to assume; and then the question was not whether Dr. Priestley had actually attempted to explain it on a different principle from that which I charge him with maintaining: but whether (upon the supposition that my account of his opinion be just) when applied to this, or any other text of similar import, such consequences as I have ascribed to it will not follow? This, Sir, appears to me so clear a case, that I am willing to refer it to the tribunal of common sense, being thoroughly convinced that no man endued with this faculty (who has not *your* feelings on the occasion) will conclude that my design was to exhibit your *actual treatment* of the passage in question. It is thus, however, you manage your reiterated charge of misrepresentation: and it is on such ground as this you proceed (in confidence, no doubt, of having substantiated your accusation) page 7, to admonish me in these terms, sufficiently discouraging and alarming to the feelings of a young writer. "This Sir, I hope will be a lesson to you in your future attempts at controversy, and teach you not to write from *imagination only* but to have some *facts* to go upon. What would

B

you

“ you think of a judge, or jury, who should
“ treat a criminal as you have done me, that
“ is, condemn him not only without evidence,
“ but contrary to evidence and that of the
“ plainest kind.” Which of us may have betrayed the stronger signs of being imposed on by our *imagination*, or of being misled by a *less innocent* principle in the conduct of this business, I am content to leave to the judgment of all candid and impartial men.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R III.

REV. SIR,

WITH regard to the subject of the *inspiration of the scriptures*, I am far from thinking that "you have no occasion to discuss this with me," much less am I disposed to admit (as a sufficient apology for your conduct) the reason assigned by you for declining this discussion. You say, page 23, "The subject of the inspiration of the scriptures, on which you enlarge so much, I have no occasion to discuss with you, because I allow the infallibility of the writers as far as the question between us is concerned." It will be worth while to examine the truth of this representation, as it will tend a little to illustrate your real sentiments on this important subject.

The reader will recollect that my principal business with you respects the *infallibility of the apostolic testimony*, which, I have endeavoured to prove, your hypothesis on inspiration tends directly to invalidate. He will also perceive that I have confined this testimony to one particular

ticular subject; viz. *the person of Christ*. Now though your theory is in fact calculated to destroy the validity of this testimony in all its essential branches, I considered it a very desirable matter fairly to estimate its importance on this one point; and especially as the person of Christ (being the grand subject now in dispute) is the great doctrine which I would wish by this means, clearly to ascertain. With respect to the infallibility of the apostolic testimony on this point, you say page 1, "It is an authority which I had never called in question," and in page 6, "Having ever considered the testimony of the apostles in this case as infallible, as much as you can do." In the passage already cited in the preceding page, "I allow the infallibility of the writers as far as the question between us is concerned." But how are these expressions of your deference for the authority of apostolical inspiration proved? Is it, Sir, by the sentiments already examined in my former letters, or by the following passage in page 23, of your answer? "As to the person of Christ, it was impossible, *without any inspiration*, for the apostles to be under any mistake about it." This is, no doubt, to assert in very strong terms your opinion of their infallibility in this case: but the reader will observe the infallibility here vouchsafed them is of that sort

fort in which *inspiration* is no way concerned: indeed, by your own confession it must have been absolutely *unnecessary*. For if it was impossible, *without any inspiration*, that they should mistake on the subject, it will follow, that this was not a fit occasion for God to interpose by extraordinary direction; and consequently, that the apostles were left, in this business, entirely to the guidance of their own reason, that is, they were not inspired at all. Which was the thing to be demonstrated from Dr. Priestley's hypothesis. A business in which he has now (without my sollicitation) kindly assisted me.

But, Sir, this business is more than absurd, it is *disingenuous*. For apprehending, as it should seem, that "a good natural understanding" might possibly spy out the above conclusion, by a comparison of your sentiments on the subject; you have endeavoured to provide against the evil by raising a doubt in note page 3, *Whether the doctrine concerning the person of Christ were really an object of the apostolic mission*. You clearly foresaw that in proportion as the *negative* of this question weighed with our readers it would enfeeble my inference; because it would very naturally suggest the enquiry, "if Dr. Priestley supposes that the doctrine concerning the person of Christ

“ really made no part of the apostolic mission, what will Mr. Burn obtain to his argument by shewing (as in the above instance) “ that in Dr. Priestley’s opinion the apostles “ were in possession of no extraordinary information on that subject, nor indeed required “ any?” But this piece of generalship, Sir, will not avail you in the present instance. For the question still returns, if the person of Christ constituted no part of the apostolic mission, how comes it to pass that you allow, page 23, this to be in fact a point admitted between us, and concerning which you fully grant the testimony of the apostles to have been *infallible*? The reader will perceive that the ideas which the apostles attached to the person of Christ do not enter into the present question; the enquiry being simply, whether they bore any testimony to his person at all, and whether this were infallible. Dr. Priestley in note, page 3, declares, that on this point “ nothing is said in our Saviour’s “ own instructions, or commission, which only “ required them to preach the gospel to every “ creature;” and yet in page 23, 24, he allows they *did bear testimony* concerning his person and that this testimony is *infallible*. This, to common observers, may have the appearance of contradiction: but a little enquiry will convince us, that even Dr. Priestley’s contradictions

dictions, which at first view may a little surprize, are admirably calculated to illuminate—*his real sentiments.*

The amount of the business is plainly this: when the apostles introduce passages from the Old Testament which contain names and characters appropriate to the Supreme Being, as applicable to Christ; then, his *person* forms no part of their mission, or as interpreters of the scriptures they were not better informed than their unbelieving countrymen. *When* they speak of Christ as a *man*, their character instantly assumes a different aspect; for now they give testimony to his person, and their testimony is allowed to be infallible as far as the question in *this* view of it is concerned. But this would be too much to say in plain and direct terms, and therefore it is scattered about in detached *paragraphs*, and elucidatory *notes* of *doubtful* signification; evidently with a view to weaken that just veneration due to apostolic authority, as far as this is conceived to countenance that obnoxious doctrine THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

It may here, possibly, be objected that the passages you produce from your other writings page 6, 7, &c. are a proof that you entertain a very different opinion of apostolic authority in

this business. But this plea, also, is utterly inadmissible. Those passages are indeed in direct contradiction to the sentiments you entertain on the subject of inspiration. But I have already disclaimed all part in the contradictions of Dr. Priestley. You must have known that, in the question between us, the introduction of those passages was really nothing to your purpose. They might indeed serve the disingenuous purpose of confounding the business, and by this means of procuring for your real sentiments a temporary respite from that just indignation due to them in a christian country; but this cannot be of long continuance. Time aided by calm investigation must, infallibly, expose the artifice. I must have been ignorant indeed of the part you have taken in the controversy concerning the person of Christ, if I had entertained a doubt of your having *appealed to the scriptures* in support of your opinion on that subject; and I must have wanted common sense not to have seen that your views of their *inspiration* rendered such an appeal a very great absurdity.

This procedure, Sir, on which you lay so great stress in your exculpation, is just as rational as if you were (in a court of justice) first of all to exercise your ingenuity to persuade
the

the court that the testimony of a particular witness was not to be *depended on*; and afterwards, in the course of the same business, were solemnly to *appeal* to the testimony of that very witness in support of any allegation you might submit for its judgement. The only difference in these cases would be, that, in a court of justice, the monstrous absurdity of such a business would be seen through and exposed at once; whereas in this, by keeping your principles and their consequences at as great a distance as possible, common men are not prepared at once to see their connection; and this circumstance, I have no doubt, may have led some very well meaning people of your own denomination as well as others, to conclude, that you do not hold the opinions which are generally ascribed to you on this and other important subjects.

In this view I cannot but regard with extreme pity your attempt page 33. to persuade the public that we adopt the "*same rule*" in judging of the extent in which the apostles were inspired. But how is our rule of judgement in this case proved to be the same? why, truly, by a passage in note page 17, where certain circumstances are enumerated concerning which I grant the apostles were not inspired at all! Now though I readily allow
that

that what is there conceded (in those cases which are particularly specified) does contain *your* general maxim on this subject; I do, at the same time, as expressly deny that *this* proves our opinion on the subject to be the same. My idea of the extent of their inspiration as stated in that note is expressed in these words. "All that we contend for is this; that "in the *doctrinal* and *prophetical* parts of scripture and whatever else was necessary to be "revealed, the apostles wrote from the immediate suggestion of the holy spirit; and as "to all other things that sacred person so far "superintended and directed them as to secure them from error: it not being consistent with the honour of God to suffer them "who by miracles proved a mission from him, "to stamp a credit upon falsehood, by virtue "of that mission."

This excellent passage, Sir, states pretty clearly *those occasions* which I deem *extraordinary*, and in which, I conceive, a divine interposition to have been both necessary and proper. The reader, by examining the whole passage, will instantly perceive that the preceding part of the note was expressly intended as an exception to the general rule here adopted. Whether, therefore, Paul might or might not have forgotten himself, and left his cloak somewhere else

else then at *Troas*, is a supposition that in no way affects my general maxim. For allowing even this to have happened, my maxim hath already decided that *this* would not have been a fit occasion for a divine interposition, because this mistake would in no respect have affected the great objects of his mission. When, therefore, I consider the apostles as being "so far superintended in writing as to "be by this mean secured from error," I am, in common construction, to be understood as confining that *superintendence* to the *objects* of their mission only.

But imagining you had found me tripping in this part of the subject you proceed to say, page 23, "Now there is no error that I ascribe to the apostles of any more consequence to the real object of their mission than such a mistake (alluding to the case supposed with respect to St. Paul) as this." Could this be proved with as much weight of evidence, as it is here asserted with appearance of confident simplicity, I should with pleasure extend to Dr. Priestley the right hand of fellowship, on this subject. But a very little attention to your real conduct in this business will sufficiently prove, [that it is not more compleatly at variance with my views of the subject, than with those of *Christ himself*.

Amongst

Amongst the real objects of the apostolic mission, I rank the knowledge of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. You on the contrary, suppose that "the great object of their mission did not require any particular illumination with respect to the knowledge of the scriptures:" and, on this assumption you have even dared to affirm, that "they often applied the scriptures very improperly, and with no better judgment than their unbelieving countrymen."

Now, Sir, independently of every thing already advanced in refutation of this most extravagant hypothesis, there is this consideration to which I beg your attention and that of our readers. It is evident that on this question (whether any particular illumination respecting the knowledge of the scriptures was necessary in the case of the apostles) Jesus Christ, and Dr. Priestley are at issue. Dr. Priestley without difficulty admits, and (if the passages last cited have any determinate meaning) he expressly asserts that such illumination was not necessary. Jesus Christ was as expressly of the contrary opinion. For in his interview with his two disciples going to *Emmaus*, he thought it absolutely necessary "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, to expound to them in *all the scriptures* the things

“things concerning himself.” And afterwards when he “suddenly appeared to the eleven and them that were with them at Jerusalem,” he thought it necessary to “open their understandings that they might know the scriptures.” And finally to convince them (and us also) that such illumination would be of *permanent* necessity in their case, in his consolatory address to the same persons before his departure, he declared himself in these very interesting words, “But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father shall send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.” John 14, 26. This, Sir, seems a very plain case. And yet you are of opinion that a “particular illumination with respect to the knowledge of these very scriptures was not necessary to the apostles of Jesus Christ.” You even maintain that, they “often applied the scriptures very improperly,” and yet you assure us, with an air of perfect innocence, that there is “no error you ascribe to the apostles of any more consequence to the real object of their mission than that of St. Paul would have been, had it escaped his recollection whether his cloak were left at *Troas*, or at *Antioch*!” It is impossible to understand this assertion *literally* without charging
it

it with contradiction and insult. With *contradiction* to your avowed principles on *inspiration*, which have been shewn, in *one* important instance, to be at variance with those of Jesus Christ: and with *insult* to the common sense of christians if you imagined that so palpable an absurdity, as it contains, would escape without the most marked and decided disapprobation.

Whether now we adopt the same rule and only differ in our application of it, on this important subject, the reader will judge. He will also observe, with respect to *those occasions* which I deem *extraordinary* (i. e. in which I consider *divine illumination* to have been necessary) but which Dr. Priestley sees and treats in a different light; that in this he does not merely (as he asserts) set up his reason against *mine*, but, as has been shewn from their very different opinions in the above instance, he even presumes to oppose his reason to the clear and express judgement of Christ himself. Now, Sir, if our Saviour's testimony respecting his own inspiration may be depended on where he declares to his disciples, "*The word which you hear, is not mine, but the Father's which sent me;*" it will, I think, follow pretty clearly, that in thus opposing the confident decisions of your own reason against the actual judgement

ment of Christ (respecting the inspiration of his apostles) you do in fact oppose that same *reason* to the authority of GOD HIMSELF. Surely Sir, he that in any sense despiseth the testimony of such a witness, "despiseth not man" but God," who in an eminent degree endued him with his holy spirit.

I would recommend to your serious attention the following scriptures, venturing at the same time even to "*pray*" that God by his holy inspiration may enable you clearly to understand them with reference to your own conduct in this business. *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. John 14, 10. and 4, 38.* The preceding observations will shew to whom the very serious charge of *setting up reason against revelation* properly belongs.

But it seems still that "my notions on the subject of *inspiration* are extremely crude and indigested, or that I am incapable of expressing my meaning" on the subject; because I have, in the last paragraph of my letters, used the following words, "If according to your hypothesis the *reason* of the individual be competent to determine the *authority*"

"rity as well as the sense of scripture: our
 "faith must, contrary to scripture, stand in
 "the wisdom of man: but if on the contrary;
 "the INFALLIBILITY of the apostolic testimony
 "be a defensible doctrine, without precluding
 "the use of reason, it places our faith, where
 "truly enlightened reason requires it should
 "be, in the POWER OF GOD."

In the above passage I have endeavoured to
 bring the important question between us with-
 in the compass of a single sentence. This
 circumstance, to a more candid reader than
 yourself, would have been a sufficient reason
 for his referring back to my *general argument* for
 the elucidation of any obscurities which might
 occur in the passage. But the fact is that the
 absurdities charged upon it by you page 27,
 are entirely of your *own* invention.

I have in no sense discouraged the use of
 reason (in the particular case supposed in that
 passage) being as thoroughly convinced, as
 you can be, that the determination of such a
 question would be impossible without it. To
 ascertain the respective pretensions of the *Bible*,
 and of the *Koran*, to divine authority, the in-
 ternal and external evidence appropriate to
 each must be carefully examined; and for this
 purpose the use of reason is indispensibly ne-
 cessary.

cessary. But farther than this the province of reason, in this case, does not extend. For the moment I have discovered that the *divine authority* of the bible is established by clear and infallible proofs, I am bound by *that authority* to admit as true *the contents* of that sacred book.

Let reason discriminate by the most rigorous investigation the false miracle from the true; but let her at the same time admit that the testimony, in confirmation of which a real miracle hath been wrought, must be infallible. Whatever by fair consequence tends to weaken this proposition does an injury to the authority of revelation, and even to the veracity of God himself, for which no refinement in *rational religion* can ever compensate. It is, therefore, Sir, to your theory as opposing *the use* of reason to the *divine authority*, and not to your introducing it for the purpose you mention, that I decidedly object.

I do not, as you *familiarly* express it, "take the mere word of the apostles for their infallibility." No: I consider them as men divinely inspired: as men whose inspiration was confirmed by *the finger of God working with them*; and who were themselves so thoroughly *persuaded* of the fact of *their inspiration* (with respect to the religion they taught) that one of

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them

them considered himself fully authorized to pronounce an *anathema*, on the man, or angel, who should presume to preach *another gospel*, Gal. i. 8, 9. The same apostle considers the contempt shewn to *his* authority as a contumacious opposition to God himself, which would have been an unpardonable assumption in any man who could not have proved by clear and indisputable evidence that he had *the spirit of God*, and was really acting under *his* authority. 1 Thes. iv. 8.

The thing, Sir, which my reason seeks in this business is the proof of *God speaking in them*: when this is once ascertained, the obligation to admit the infallibility of their testimony (should it even be found to inculcate the doctrine of a *trinity*, or of *atonement*) becomes indisputable. But if reason forgetful of her province, will presume to judge what God *ought* to have revealed; and proudly objecting to the *sense* of his revelation dares to call in question its infallibility: I do in these respects, from my soul “reprobate” reason: and *I do* think that its influence in these views ought seriously to be “dreaded” by every real friend to christianity.

You may now, if you please, inform the public that these sentiments arise from a consciousness

sciousness that my opinions will *not bear the light of reason*: that they are only the fears of an interested bigot to forms of established belief; and that the spirit of *free enquiry* ought not to be checked by such apprehensions. If, Sir, it will gratify a favourite passion, or serve in any point your *great cause*, you may without molestation indulge and even propagate this view of my conduct. I shall only take leave to remind you, that my idea of *inspiration*, should you hereafter think proper to controvert it, is a *fixed and determinate* idea; and that our readers may (without trouble) be prepared to confront it with your present, or with any future representations of it with which you may favour the public, I shall here submit it in few words.

The inspiration of the apostles consisted in *the faculty of clearly understanding, and of communicating to others, with infallible certainty, the knowledge of supernatural truth*. Of this inspiration *miracles* were the *proof*: and of the truth of these miracles, as distinguished from imposture, *reason* was to be the judge. Upon the supposition that these miracles were true (which appears a most rational conclusion) the *infallible inspiration* of the apostles, as far as the great object of their mission was concerned, follows of course; and, by consequence, the obligation upon us to admit the truth of *all* their instructions.

In this view of the subject the distinct provinces of revelation, of reason, and of faith are pretty clearly marked out.

I object, Sir, to your theory of *inspiration*, because by a prostitution of reason from its only proper use, its authority is in fact, though not professedly, opposed to that of *revelation*; and by making the decisions of reason the guides in matters of belief, it compleatly destroys at one stroke, the doctrine and obligation of christian *faith*.

I shall conclude this letter by a passage that will at once illustrate and confirm my ideas on the subject.

“ It is most certain” says this eminent writer, “ that a divine revelation, if any be extant in the world; a divine revelation, which “ is in other words, a discovery of some part “ of God’s own knowledge made by God himself, notwithstanding that fallible men have “ been made the instruments of the communication, must be perfectly free from all mixture of ignorance and error, in the particular subject in which the discovery is “ made. The discovery may, and, unless the “ powers of the human mind were infinite, “ it cannot but be limited and partial: but as far

“ far as it extends, it must be accurate. For
“ a false proposition, or a mistake, is the very
“ reverse of a discovery.—In whatever relates,
“ therefore, to religion, either in theory or
“ practice, the knowledge of the sacred writers
“ was infallible, as far as it extended, or their
“ inspiration had been a mere pretence. And
“ in the whole extent of that subject, faith
“ must be renounced, or reason must submit
“ to their oracular decisions.” *Bishop of St.*
David's sermon on the principle of vitality in man.
Page 2 and 3.

When you next favour the public with
your lucubrations on this important subject,
remember not “ indeed an old saying,” but
one that has some truth in it; that no man
is against the *authority* of the bible, till the *sense*
of it is against him.

I am, &c.

LETTER

[illegible]

L E T T E R I V.

REV. SIR,

HAD you done me the justice fairly to state what I have offered on the subject of your appeal to the sentiments of the fathers concerning the person of Christ, it would have prevented, what I deem, the disagreeable necessity, of retorting the heavy charge of misrepresentation. I had persuaded myself that if any thing in my letters merited the approbation of Dr. Priestley, it would be the sentiments I have submitted on that subject, because they are in general such as, I imagined, would be deemed unexceptionable by impartial judges on both sides of the question.

You have, however, passed a very different judgment on the subject; and justice to myself obliges me to say, that there is no business so *plain*, which a similar mode of representation would not *embarrass*; nor any thing so *innocent* to which it would not give the appearance at least of *criminality*. That our readers may judge of the truth of this remark, I

shall content myself with producing the passages in the connected form in which they stand in my letters; and then as you have given them in *yours*.

After stating (page 4) the necessity of admitting some general principles as *media* of proof in order to the determination of every controversy; and shewing that these *media* should have as natural and as obvious a relation to the subject as possible: I observe, "That on these grounds it has, as often as I
 " have considered the subject, appeared to me
 " in a high degree preposterous to advert to
 " *early opinions* in proof of a doctrine, which
 " from its *nature* can ultimately be determined
 " by the *scriptures only*. For, if the New Testament be an authentic document it is profitable and sufficient for doctrine: and when
 " considered in connection with itself will be
 " found the best interpreter of its own intentions; but if on the contrary, it be a book
 " of doubtful, or fallible authority, it requires
 " but little penetration to discover, that no
 " opinion ancient or modern, can so far
 " change its character, as to give it the stamp
 " of infallibility."

This is the passage as it stands in *my* letters; Dr. Priestley has chosen to force it from its
 natural

natural connection, and, by this act of violence has presented it to the public in that distorted form which it exhibits in his. The candid reader will instantly perceive that by concluding his quotation with the words "the scriptures only" he conceals entirely the reason, which I immediately assign for the opinion expressed in that quotation. By this means it appears merely as an assertion unsupported by any sort of authority whatever. A very little trouble would have enabled you to produce the whole passage, and then if you had chosen to controvert it fairly, the public would have been able to judge between us.

I should be inclined to attribute your conduct in this business to the natural rapidity of your manner, but for several circumstances of the same kind which have already occurred, and that the very *next sentence* in your third letter furnishes a fresh specimen of the same disingenuous temper. You represent me as saying, that "discussions of this nature can do little more than excite the sneer of infidelity, and are manifestly incongruous and absurd". But *why* do I say this? Is there nothing like a reason offered for this opinion? Surely, Sir, you never can have read, or what amounts to the same thing, never can have considered, the following passage, on which the
above

above sentence necessarily rests as its foundation. "If I thought the Fathers competent to decide this important question, I should not despair of finding their suffrages abundantly in favour of that system for which I contend; but really, Sir, it strikes me as a matter of very little consequence *what* the fathers taught on this subject, while the *validity* of that sacred record, from which they profess to derive their opinions is *itself undetermined*. Let this point once be *fixed*, and it may then be proper to advert to *early opinions*; but till this be done, discussions of this nature can do little more than excite the sneer of infidelity at an attempt (to decide the doctrines of christianity) so manifestly incongruous and absurd." page 6. This passage speaks for itself.

With regard to the other citations from page 28, their propriety must depend on the truth of my general argument. If I have been successful in proving that you hold opinions which do in fact injure the general authority of scripture; an attempt to ascertain the sense of that record by any foreign authorities whatever, I should suspect, would not be deemed a compliment either to the understanding, or integrity of any man. You may indeed in such researches find materials on which to exercise

ercise your talent for disputation; but what do you illustrate that is obscure, what do you ascertain that is doubtful, by these means? You imagine you find your own sense of scripture in these ancient interpreters; but allowing for a moment this to be the case, of what real consequence (upon your theory of inspiration) can this sense be to any man? Just as much as your being assured, that the present Minister of Great Britain (provided you should *out live* him) had left a will expressly in *your* favour; but upon further enquiry you had the mortification to find that the will itself (though indisputably the will of Mr. Pitt, and with regard to *sense* expressly in favour of Dr. Priestley) was not duly attested, and consequently not authentic. A discovery like this would no doubt be a source of pleasing reflection during the remainder of your few and evil days, as it would furnish an unequivocal assurance of the high sense which that great man entertains of your actual merits; but alas! *præterea nihil.*

Besides, Sir, not to insist farther upon the extreme absurdity of an appeal to the Fathers in this case, it strikes me as being upon *your* principles a most *unnecessary* business. For if your account of the superior advantages of modern interpreters may be depended upon

upon, they are certainly much better qualified to appreciate the merits of this great question than either the apostles themselves, or their immediate successors.

“*We*” (say you, speaking with reference to the apostles as interpreters of scripture and particularly of *Heb. i. 13.*) *who have not the “prejudices of Jews, and who are much better situated for taking an enlarged view of the subject in all its connections* must judge for ourselves as *they did.”* Theol. Repos. vol. 4, page 113. If I understand the spirit of this remark, it is simply this; that every progressive remove in point of time, from the apostolic age, has been an advance in the scale of Theological research, towards that refinement which so eminently distinguishes the modern interpreters of sacred writ; and consequently, as the writers of the *second* and *third* centuries had fewer prejudices and more light than those of the *first*, we of the *eighteenth*, calculating our improvement by this *ratio*, must have made astonishing advances towards perfection.

It may be objected, that this representation of the matter is contradicted by what you produce (page 20,) from some former publications, in explanation of the business. This may possibly be the case; but if the above
account

account of your opinion, taken from another work of yours, be just, I must be excused from taking any share in Dr. Priestley's contradictions.

With these views, you must imagine I felt myself not a little alarmed by the following declaration. "If, after reading these passages, you still have no clearer idea of the nature and object of my late disquisitions concerning the opinions of early times, than you had when you wrote your letters to me, *I am not able to do any thing more for you*, and my conduct must remain as inexplicable as ever." Page 21.

This, Sir, is rendering my situation *desperate* indeed! It would have been compassionate in you to have afforded me another chance before you gave me entirely up. Indeed the very flattering account you have so obligingly laid before the public of "my good natural understanding and my youth" is calculated in some measure to encourage a hope that this may yet be the case. I am at least represented as an *improvable* subject; and it may perhaps be worth your while to bestow a little more patience on me and some few additional reasons which may have a tendency to place the

the real motives of your appeal to *early opinions* in a more consistent and convincing point of light.

As the matter stands at present, it does, I freely own, exceed my comprehension to discover *why* (upon your theory of its inspiration) the sense of the apostolic testimony should be deemed worthy of investigation *at all*; or *why* (upon any other theory) we should have recourse to the aid of *traditional evidence* in the determination of a question, which (by your account) *we ourselves are much better qualified to understand.*

The public will now I hope be inclined to give me some little credit with respect to my knowledge of your writings, which you more than insinuate I have entirely overlooked or misrepresented in this business; and they will also perceive that as an interpreter of them, I have taken some pains to collect their true sense, not from imperfect and mutilated quotation, but from the more sure and equitable mode of comparing *you with yourself.*

What I have here said will also I hope contribute something to the elucidation of what you call "my curious allusion to your floundering
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"ering in the toils of popish sophistry." I am surprized that a person of your discernment and information should have been for a moment at a loss to decipher my meaning in this allusion; and much more so, that you should attribute it to "my misapprehension" of your conduct in *appealing to early opinions*. I now tell you (for your particular information) that I had in view the famous *circular argument* of the church of Rome, by which she would establish alternately her own *infallibility* from the scriptures, and the *sense* of those scriptures by that *infallibility*: and I again repeat it, that your manner of treating the scriptures and tradition, in the present controversy, is an exact counterpart of the conduct of that church in this particular.

With regard to my quotation from *Seed*, the subject of which you affirm to be notoriously *false*, in point of fact, I shall only say, that even upon this supposition, the main question between us is no way affected by the truth of a passage introduced merely for the purpose of elucidation. But it is by no means necessary to concede you thus much: for, as we have only your own words for the opinion you respectively adopt, why may not Dr. Priestley's word go as far as Mr. Seed's, and Mr. Seed's

as

as far as Dr. Priestley's? To constitute a fact *notorious*, something more is required than the mere word of those who report it; and when the credibility of the individuals giving, as in this instance, a contrary account of the same transaction is *equal*, the public will of course do as I have done, judge for themselves.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R V.

REV. SIR,

THERE is no part of your conduct in this controversy that I behold with greater concern, than that which relates to the *consequences* of your opinion on the subject of *inspiration*.

My deductions from that opinion whether true, or false, appeared to me in a very serious point of light; and as they were offered in terms sufficiently respectful to Dr. Priestley, it certainly became him to meet the business with that regard to decorum which its importance demands from every friend to christianity.

I must confess there is no circumstance which, as a collateral evidence, has contributed more to confirm me in the truth of those consequences which I have charged upon your theory, than the manner in which you would hide them from the eye of the public.

Your attempt to convert my examination of your *opinion* into an attack upon your *character*—to confound a question strictly religious,
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and on which christians in every age have been generally agreed, with *one* confessedly of a *political* nature, and concerning which, late discussions have proved, there is a material difference of opinion in this country;—your new and very extraordinary *doctrine of inferences* by which a man is rendered accountable *only* for those consequences (of his opinion) which he *himself* allows; (page 26) which is in plainer terms to preclude all discussion, and to procure for the worst opinion a compleat exemption from detection and censure:—these, Sir, are attempts which I must regard as made with no other design than that of concealing from public view, and of rescuing from public detestation *the tendency* of your opinion in this instance. Personal considerations, you must have known were out of the question, and if these have been obtruded upon public notice, that is your affair, and not mine. I can distinguish between Dr. Priestley and his opinions; but whatever be the respect I entertain (in many regards) for *the man*, this will never deter me from any enquiry into his religious *opinions* which I may think proper to institute, or induce me to withhold that just censure of them, which their tendency shall appear to require.

With regard to your *attempt* at humour (for it seems it has not yet “pleased God to make you

"you a wit") it is, I confess, one of the very few things in your reply which I deem perfectly *harmless*.

I do indeed think that *fasting* is a branch of christian discipline too much neglected among us; and that *prayer* is a christian exercise in which no man need be ashamed to excel; but I cannot prevail with myself to believe that a Dissenting Minister, *fifty years ago*, might (with impunity) have introduced either for the mere purpose of low and impertinent buffoonery.

Till you have, Sir, by sound argument refuted my charge, the use of ridicule will, at least, be hazardous. It may, instead of exposing the absurdity of my fears, serve rather to exhibit the struggles of a superior understanding to conceal its own embarrassments.

But *the consequences*, which I ascribe to your theory, are stated at large in *the third* of my former letters. They are, I grant, of a most serious nature, and it deeply concerns the public to know whether they do attach to your opinions or not. For myself I do not (for reasons already assigned, and which you have not even attempted to answer) entertain the least doubt on the *affirmative* of this question.

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Till, therefore, that hypothesis which has been shewn by fair consequence to *invalidate* the infallibility of the apostolic testimony, can be proved to establish *the* authority of the New Testament;—till that opinion which, transferring the authority of scripture from *the inspiration* of the penmen to *the decisions* of mere reason, can be shewn to confirm the claims of revelation above *those* of reason;—and, till that theory which, *if acted upon*, would reduce obedience to the decalogue itself to a question of *mere expediency*, can be proved, in a high degree conducive to the *practice of virtue*;—I shall consider every reference had to your *own* character, in extenuation of your principles, as an implied acknowledgment of their guilt; every allusion to *mine*, whether for the purpose of impertinent *levity*, or of personal invective, as a subject of *pity*; and every recourse to logical *finesse*, in the determination of such a question, as an offence equally against the light of reason, and the solemnity of eternal truth.

With regard to your *catechism*, (which in compassion to my *youth* you have broken into three short questions) I shall only say,

1. That after the most serious attention to the subject, I see little difference between the tendency of a theory which by fair construction
invalidates

invalidates, and of one which professedly rejects the infallibility of the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ.

2. The reader will perceive, from my fourth letter, that I am reduced to the same difficulty when I examine *the reason* of your appeal to early opinions. Why the Fathers should be called in to determine *the sense* of a testimony, *the validity* of which, is by your hypothesis rendered, at least, extremely doubtful; and by men, who, in your opinion, must be much better qualified to settle that point than the Fathers could be, are questions which I submit (not as a *catechism*; no: that were presumptuous) for your farther elucidation.

3. If you allow the apostolic testimony to have been infallible “without *inspiration*,” I beg to be informed *what* it is in that testimony that induces your assent to any thing that it contains? Is it the authority of God manifest in the apostles, or is it *the decisions of your own reason* on what they taught? Both it cannot be—for if (as you affirm) this testimony were infallible “without any inspiration,” *the authority of God* is totally out of the question; and then whether you are governed in your belief by your *own reason* as distinct from, or in opposition to *this authority*, I leave the reader to judge.

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But it is, I believe, usual in a course of *catechetical instruction* to teach young people the *sense* of the commandments: I have the misfortune to be charged, by my great instructor, with the *breach* of, at least, two of them. Impatient as I feel under a charge of this serious nature, I will hasten to my exculpation.

In page 31 you say, "As to the *decalogue*,
 "you certainly break one of the command-
 "ments, viz. the *first*, which, from this cir-
 "cumstance, we may suppose, not to be of
 "the least importance. It is that which so-
 "lemnly enjoins the acknowledgment and
 "worship of only *one God*."

My belief of the deity of Christ is, no doubt, the ground of this weighty accusation. To infer, however, from hence that I either acknowledge, or worship more Gods than one, is a consequence which I do not *allow*; and this, according to *your mode* of reasoning, is all that need be said in refutation of the charge. "No man, you say, is properly answerable
 "for any thing more than he himself allows," page 26. I do *not* allow, but on the contrary I reject with "indignation" the opinion which by any mode of fair construction is chargeable with such a consequence; it is therefore, on
 your

your own principle, "unfair to ascribe this
to me." But,

Non *tali* auxilio——
—— *tempus* eget.

I shall refer you to a single passage of scripture as my best apology for the opinion I entertain of Jesus Christ. St. John in the 5th chap. of his *revelation*, gives the following account of the worship of heaven.

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of
"many angels round about the throne, and
"the beasts; and the elders: and the number
"of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying
"with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb that
"was slain, to receive power, and riches, and
"wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which
"is in heaven, and on the earth, and under
"the earth, and such as are in the sea, heard
"I, saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory,
"and power be unto HIM that sitteth upon
"the throne, *and* unto THE LAMB for ever
"and ever."

On this passage I would submit these observations.

1. That whatever worship is offered to Jehovah in heaven must be *essential* and *incommunicable* worship.

2. That this *same essential adoration* which is here offered to *him* that sitteth upon the throne, is, by *the consent* of heaven, ascribed also THE LAMB.

3. I conclude from hence, either that Christ is a proper object of divine worship (which no mere creature can be) or that *the first commandment* is continually violated in heaven. *Thou shalt have none other gods before me*, (that is in my presence) is the divine injunction;—whereas, if (as you affirm) Christ be not God, it will follow; that an altar is erected, in the very *presence* of Jehovah, on which the sacrifice of supreme adoration is offered to an *idol*; and that the whole company of heaven is joined in the defection!

If I must still incur the guilt of *idolatry*, for the reverence I pay THE BLESSED JESUS, let me, at least, enjoy the consolation to reflect that, I err in company of the wisest, the most pure, and the most numerous part of God's intelligent creatures! Let me, at least, enjoy *this* consolation while under the frown of *rational religion*, and, of its great apostle, Dr. Priestley! Whether

Whether in the above passage of St. John "God and Christ are mentioned as beings, of quite a *different rank*, and much more so than "man and beast;" and whether it appears from this, that "in no sense *whatever*, not even in "the *lowest sense of all*, is Christ so much as "called God in the New Testament;" I leave to the common sense of mankind to determine. See Dr. Priestley's letters, page 7.

As to my "shameful violation" of the ninth commandment, I trust my present vindication will (with all dispassionate men) sufficiently clear both my intention, and my conduct from so vile an aspersión. The cause, for which I contend, neither requires the aids of personal invective, or of studied misrepresentation. The sentiments, to which I except, are stated in your *own words*; and, as to the deductions made from those sentiments, they are such as, I verily believe, would have occurred to any impartial enquirer who had given the same attention to the subject.

If it should still appear that I have been mistaken, to confess that mistake (upon a proper representation) will be no great mortification, as it will only be to acknowledge myself *better informed* than I am at this moment;—and even then, I shall have the satisfaction to reflect,

fect, that whatever have been my errors in this business, they have arisen rather from a *defect* of understanding, than a *perverse* intention of heart.

You tell me, indeed, for my encouragement page 31, that though I have "shamefully violated this commandment," you still "believe I had no very bad intention at bottom."

Now, Sir, though it may exceed my ingenuity to find out *how* the "shameful violation" of any divine command can consist with *goodness* of intention, even in the lowest degree of it: I cannot but perceive that, in this extraordinary compliment, you either had no design, or, that through a defect of memory you have in page 33, flatly contradicted yourself. You there affirm that in my letters to you, I have not preserved the "least regard either to truth, or probability;" that the subject of my letters is "a gross, and ill founded calumny;" and (by implication at least) that my persisting in my present opinion of your sentiments, will determine me to be a man destitute of every "remain of christian principle;"—and yet you give me credit for *the goodness* of my intention at bottom! at any rate, you think, I could not have had any *very bad*

bad design in the "shameful violation" of these commandments!

You still however call upon me to repent of my foul offence against "God, the public and yourself." To this I shall only say, that in my system, repentance, to be genuine, must be the result of clear and settled *conviction*; but as this has not yet arrived, I shall be content rather to endure your censures on my obstinacy, than by a feigned contrition incur the guilt of dissimulation.

You demand, "which of these commandments do you charge us Unitarians with habitually violating?" I answer, that it must be notorious to every impartial reader, that principles, and not actions, are the subjects of my animadversion. Why then this continual appeal to *character* in a question that relates to *principles* only? You will possibly say, that in this you only adopt our Lord's maxim when he says of false teachers, "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*"

But you must be aware that this maxim, though in general a safe guide with regard to such persons, does not hold universally. For I might (speaking generally) say, upon the very same authority, that such men sometimes
appear

appear as "*Wolves in sheep's cloathing.*" The fact is though in a character notoriously bad there is just reason to suspect some radical defect in principle,—yet *the converse* of this proposition may not in every instance be depended on.

We know that the most malignant spirit in the universe is not chargeable with any *gross* immorality; and we know also that his servants, the more effectually to accomplish their purpose of destruction to the souls of men, sometimes appear as "*Angels of Light.*"

Till, therefore, the character of Unitarians be attacked, every appeal to it, on this question, must necessarily be deemed impertinent; and till your theory on inspiration be vindicated from the tendencies charged upon it in my letters, every such appeal must be considered merely as an argument to *the passions of men.* In courts of criminal judicature an appeal, I believe is seldom made to *the character* of the culprit, except, in cases, where *the fact* is pretty clearly ascertained.

But it may not be improper under the head of *consequences*, to offer an additional remark or two on the passage quoted by our Lord from the 110th psalm.

In

In page 19 you say, "whether Jesus considered the passage he quoted as originally relating to himself, or whether he only argued with the Pharisees, as he frequently did, on their own principles, does not appear."

That our Lord did consider the passage as relating originally to himself, appears to me clear for the following reasons.

1. Because he in another place (Rev. xxii. 16.) assumes to himself a character differing but little in expression, and nothing in sense, from that contained in the passage under consideration. "I, says he, am the root and the offspring of David."

2. Because, St. Peter (whom we may justly suppose to have been acquainted with his master's idea on the subject, and especially as he then "spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost") actually applies it to him in the 2nd. of Acts, verse 34, 35, 36. As these considerations contain something like *direct evidence* (in opposition to which I find nothing in your account of the matter, but *possibility and conjecture*) there will not, it is presumed, be any further question between us on this part of the subject.

With

With regard, Sir, to my views of the subject, in which you say "I exceedingly exult," I certainly do feel that exultation in them which a consciousness of their *truth* may be supposed to inspire. I still maintain, with reference to our Lord's conduct on this occasion, (and shall continue to do so, till I receive something more conclusive in reply, than "It might be an argument *ad homines*") That, if the sense attached to this passage by the Jews were *erroneous*, it became him, whose office it was to have "compassion on the ignorant," to correct their mistake.

2. If he availed himself of an absurdity in their interpretation of it merely for the sake of victory, which (if your account of the business be intelligible) must have been the case; the very supposition degrades him to the rank of a sophist.—and,

3. That if he either *ignorantly*, or with a design to *deceive* introduced the passage as applicable to himself, these suppositions contain in them the "very extreme of impiety, and are hostile to the authority of the New Testament." Now though in my *first letters* I left you to adopt either of these suppositions which might appear, on your hypothesis, most for your purpose, and did not as you assert, page 18,
call

" call any interpretation which you might give
 " of the passage the very extreme of impi-
 " ety," &c; I do *now* maintain that, of the
 two *last* suppositions, the *FIRST* is not inconsis-
 tent with your opinion of Christ where you re-
 present him as " really having less occasion"
 for the knowledge of the scriptures, and as not
 being " better informed on the subject than
 " his disciples were," who (you affirm) " often
 " applied them very improperly, and with
 " no better judgment than their unbelieving
 " countrymen." *Theol. Repos. vol. 4. page 442.*
 And, that the *SECOND* (viz. his introducing the
 passage as applicable to himself with a design
 to *deceive*) might happen in the conduct of a
 man, who, as you represent Christ to have
 been, was " liable to *sin*, as well as subject to
 " error." *Ibid, page 445.* At least your avowed
 opinion of Christ affords *no security* against ei-
 ther of these very serious consequences.

What other interpretation of our Lord's
 conduct you may yet be able to produce I am
 not concerned to enquire;—it is sufficient, if
 I have shewn, that your *avowed* opinion of his
 character will justify *this*.

Should this interpretation still appear " the
 " very extreme of impiety," the public will
 perceive it is only offered as an obvious conse-
 quence

quence of your own views of his inspiration. It may indeed justly alarm the apprehensions of serious christians, but they will easily see that the fault is in no sense imputable to me. I have produced *the principle* from such authorities as you will not dispute; and have exposed those *consequences* which, in my apprehension, necessarily result from it.

You are, therefore, at liberty to adopt *which* you will, only recollecting that, according to every principle of sound ratiocination, a man is bound as much by *deductions* fairly made from his opinions, as by *the opinions* themselves.

With regard to my own views of our Lord's conduct, being thoroughly convinced that he understood the passage as appropriate to himself, I expressed my conviction in these words, — "In his application of this passage he was
"guided by such wisdom as made it impossible
"that he should himself have been deceived,
"and at the same time was influenced by such
"perfect sincerity as made it equally impossible that he should seek to deceive others."

Confident as I then felt of the greater propriety of this representation, I did presume to request your explicit answer to our Lord's question on the text; adding at the same time

time (you say insultingly) these words,—“ No
 “ doubt your superior advantages of know-
 “ ledge, &c. will effectually secure you from
 “ the embarrassment and consequent silence
 “ of those to whom the question was origi-
 “ nally propounded.”

But, Sir, you will find that in the opinion
 I here express of you, as a man much *better in-*
formed than *the Pharisees* were in the time of our
 Lord, I have acted solely by your own autho-
 rity. For in your “ *Observations on the prophets of*
the Old Testament” you assure us, that as interpre-
 ters of their writings, “ We” (modern and ra-
 tional christians no doubt) “ are happily deli-
 “ vered from the prejudices of Jews, and are
 “ much better situated for taking an enlarged
 “ and just view of the subject in all its con-
 “ nections.” *Theol. Repos.* vol. 4, page 113.

I could not have foreseen that to class Dr.
 Priestley with these more enlightened mo-
 derns, would by him be deemed an insult.
 But I perceive his *modesty* is hurt by so flatter-
 ing a distinction. A man who in general
 assumes so little, and who discovers such *reluc-*
tance in introducing any thing which by *impli-*
cation may be considered as a compliment to
 himself, could not fail to treat my conduct, in
 this business as too gross a flattery. The pas-
 sage

fage above cited from the *Theol. Repos.* will I hope plead something in my extenuation.

As to the sense in which, our Lord understood the passage (as applied to himself) this appears so very plain a case, that instead of *floundering in the toils* of conjectural interpretation, your more ingenuous and consistent method will be at once boldly to assert that, both in his application and sense of this passage, he applied it "very improperly and "with no better judgment than his unbelieving countrymen."

This, Sir, will be nothing more than *applying* a principle you have already avowed concerning his *inspiration*:—besides, by contracting the grounds of evidence on the subject of his *divinity*, it will save you the trouble (in your future controversies) of discussing *first principles* with your various antagonists.

I am, &c.



C O N C L U S I O N .

REV. SIR,

I HAVE examined with great attention the subject of your last letter. You recommend the use of "strong assertions," and certainly there is no man living who (from experiment) is better qualified to speak to their utility than yourself.

I am however obliged, in this business, to decline alike your example and your advice.

"Strong assertions" may in your hand, indeed, have proved irresistible--by this means you have no doubt *slain the mighty*; but the public candour will I trust allow, that, whatever may have been my presumption in venturing forth to *single* combat with so formidable a champion, I have at least, fought *fairly*.

You obligingly represent me (in your *familiar addresses to this town*) as a young man possess-

ed by "a laudable desire of rising in my profession;" and as you, no doubt, feel an equal wish to *forward* my views in that particular, you recommend, what you deem, the best mode of accomplishing my purpose.

It seems then, that having neither "education," "nor family connections" to recommend me, my only sure path to preferment is by the prostitution of (what you are pleased to call) "a good natural understanding" to the infamous purpose of personal obloquy and defamation.

But here also I reject with equal indignation the treachery of your advice, and the authority of your *example*.

In the "chase," Sir, in which I am engaged the object of my pursuit is *truth*;—and I trust, in my contest with you, I have not been unmindful of that important injunction, "*So run that ye may obtain*" But still to awaken, and stimulate my ambition, you bring before me the example of an illustrious name that, you say, has successfully gone before me in the same path.

Now, Sir, though the Church of England has shewn herself *worthy* of such a man, by an
acknowledgment

acknowledgment of his extraordinary talents; were it true, that he arrived at his present dignities by the means you recommend, he might not only possess (as he really does) those dignities without *envy* on my part; but I should consider him *then* as much the object of my pity; as he is *now* of my admiration.

No, Sir, however flattering it may be to rank with a Horsley, or a Venn even as the objects of your censure; there is no authority upon earth from which (in matters of essential belief) I am not prepared to appeal:—at the same time, if either of those eminent persons have defects (which, as they are utterly unknown to me, I will not mention) I am thoroughly convinced they would not propose them for my imitation.

With regard to the Reverend Mr. Venn (to “whose performance my letters bear so “striking a resemblance”) though your design in introducing him on this business is most obvious; I nevertheless thank you for the opportunity it affords me of expressing, publicly, the high sense I entertain of the worth of that venerable man. Of his performance, to which you allude, I received *the first* intelligence from yourself: I have since met with it, but as
it

it is upon a *different* subject, it's merits or demerits are totally out of the present question.

There is one circumstance on which I must remark, viz. my not having examined your *interpretation of the passages of scripture* produced from your other writings. Two reasons have chiefly weighed with me in this business—The one has been, that *the sense* of the scriptures makes no part of *the present* question between us:—and the other, that this work has already been done by much abler hands, and in my opinion very sufficiently.*

Having now, Sir, examined whatever appears of consequence in your reply; and having endeavoured (“on the same principle, and in “the same spirit with which I wrote my first “letters”) to rescue them from unmerited censure, I leave you to your own reflections on *the tendency* of your opinions, and on *the spirit* which has governed you in this dispute.

Should you consider my present address worthy of notice, there are two conditions which

* See particularly a small tract, printed by Binns of Leeds, entitled “*A short defence of the divinity of Christ, with a supplement containing observations on Dr. Priestley's Familiar illustration of certain passages of scripture.*” I have just been informed that the ingenious author has favoured the public with a *third edition* of this valuable tract, which I earnestly recommend to the serious attention of our readers.

I shall

I shall deem *indispensible* to the continuance of this correspondence as far, at least, as it respects myself.—The one is, that you confine yourself to *the question*:—and the other, that whatever you may think proper to advance on the subject be addressed to me *personally*.

I remain,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

EDWARD BURN.

THE END.

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EDWARD BURR

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